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SERMON

AT THE

FUNERAL OF MRS. WOODS.

CHRIST A SYMPATHIZING SAVIOUR.

A

SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

FUNERAL OF MRS. ABBY WOODS,

WIFE OF THE

REV. LEONARD WOODS, D. D.

ANDOVER, MASS., FEB. 24, 1846.

BY M. STUART.

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[The following discourse is printed at the request of the Mourners, for whom in particular it was composed and delivered. The hope that it may be instrumental in comforting others in like circumstances, is another inducement for publishing it. Being composed and delivered at short notice, I have of necessity made some slight changes in the diction here and there; but in no case have I changed the sentiment, nor added anything to it, except a short paragraph in one place, inserted for the purpose of guarding against mistake as to my real meaning. Several points, touched upon in the discourse, are of such high and sacred import, that I could most earnestly wish to enlarge upon them. But a regard to the feelings of my mourning friends induces me, to leave the whole in the same state in which it was when delivered. I hope some eminently practical Christian writer will take up the subject introduced and briefly discussed in the following pages, and present it in such a manner as to satisfy the wants, and relieve in some desirable measure the woes, of Christians under affliction.—M. S.]

SERMON.

HEBREWS V. 8.

"THOUGH HE WERE A SON, YET LEARNED HE OBEDIENCE BY THE THINGS WHICH HE SUFFERED."

SUCH is the declaration of a sacred writer respecting him "who is made a high priest forever, after the order of Melchisedec." Yet we are assured by other parts of the Scriptures, that he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," and finally, that in connection with all this, he was "made higher than the heavens." Not only so, but various declarations of the inspired writers abundantly show, that Christ had a perfect acquaintance with all the will of God, both secret and revealed, and that he was always ready, and cheerfully willing, to obey all the Father's commands, whether they required of him the active duties of his station, or the passive duty of suffering. In view of such facts, so clearly established, and so well known and universally acknowledged among Christians, does there not appear, at first sight, to be something obscure, or difficult of interpretation, in the text which I have selected as a theme for the present occasion?

So, perhaps, most readers of the passage before us may be inclined to feel. It is proper, therefore, that I should endeavour, first of all, to remove from the minds of those who listen to me, any difficulties of such a nature as has just been described. Briefly and in the most summary manner, I will attempt to do this.

Let us then first turn our attention to the assertion of the sacred writer, that our great High Priest "*learned* obedience." The plain and obvious meaning of this seems to be, that in some respect or other there was a necessity that Christ should be *taught*, as to a part of his duty, or in respect to the subject of filial obedience—be taught or instructed by his own *personal sufferings*. How could *he* be *taught*, who knew all things? How could he need to be taught *obedience*, who was perfectly sinless and always obedient? These are questions which spontaneously present themselves; and they seem, at first view, to be at least somewhat embarrassing.

I must remind my hearers, then, in order to prepare the way for a solution of them, that Christ, who is truly God, is really and truly man. "God was manifested in the flesh." "The Word, which was with God, was God," yea, "God over all and blessed forever;" and yet "he was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Two natures are therefore combined in one person; not two persons in one nature. The Lord Jesus Christ was *perfectly man*, as well as *perfectly God*. Everything belonging to our nature, in its perfect state, of course belonged to him. Everything, then, that can be predicated of such a human nature, entirely apart from sin, may therefore be predicated of him. Accordingly, the evangelist not only says of him, that "the child [Jesus] grew, and waxed strong in spirit" (Luke 1: 80), but that "*he increased in wisdom, and stature, and in favour with God and man.*" Here, most plainly, such a growth of body, of mind, and of wisdom or knowledge, as is appropriate to our nature, is ascribed to Christ without the least hesitation or abatement. Even the *gradual* increase of *favour* with God and man, is explicitly asserted. So far as the judgment of men could be exercised in respect to a gradual increase of intelligence and wisdom, there is nothing specially difficult in the case; but the increase of acceptableness or favour with God, is as plainly asserted, as that with men.

Now we can rationally understand all this, of his *human* nature only. Nor is there anything strange in such a method of interpretation. We say, with equal truth, that "Abraham is *dead*," and that "Abraham is *alive*;" the first assertion we apply to his body, the second to his soul. We may say then, with equal propriety, that Christ knew all things, and that his wisdom and knowledge were gradually increased and developed. The first is true of his Godhead; the second of his human nature. If there was not a *gradual* increase of wisdom and knowledge in his human nature, then that nature was not truly and properly human; for this is an unfailing and necessary attribute of proper humanity. On the like ground we find the Saviour is represented as being exposed to all the wants and woes of our nature. He hungered, thirsted, was wearied; was joyful, and sad; he sympathized with human sufferings, he wept; he groaned, he prayed, and this even with agony; he bowed his head upon the cross, and gave up his human soul to God. If all this does not belong to *man*—and merely to a nature that is human—then we can never say what does belong to a human nature.

All this being true, there might be, then, or rather there was, a *progressive* knowledge of obedience. So far as this knowledge extended at any period of the Saviour's life, it was always responded to on his part, by a perfectly filial and obedient spirit. But surely it is no more strange, that a perfect knowledge of obedience should be gradually attained, than it is to hear an evangelist reporting the declaration of Jesus, that not only the angels in heaven knew not the specific period when the Jewish commonwealth would be destroyed, but that even the Son himself knew it not, Mark 13: 32. As *God*, this want of knowledge in him cannot be deemed possible; but as *man*, it is not only conceivable that the knowledge of Christ was gradually obtained, but this was even an indispensable condition of a nature truly human.

One more remark I must make, before I quit this part of

my explanation. We must not suppose, that there was ever, for a moment, any deficiency of inclination to obey, in the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew *no* sin. So far as duty was known, it was ever and cheerfully complied with. But the *development* of the entire matter or principle of obedience, in the soul of the Redeemer, was a *gradual* one; and in order that it should be complete or perfect, a trial by actual suffering was needed. Our context assures us of the manner in which the Lord Jesus learned obedience: "Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and being heard on account of his devotion, although a a Son, he learned obedience by the things which he suffered." Unquestionably it is a *practical*, rather than a theoretical learning, to which the sacred writer here adverts. There was something, then, to be *learned* in respect to obedience, which nothing but circumstances of actual trial and suffering could thoroughly communicate to him, who was truly *human*, as well as divine. This we shall see more fully developed in the sequel of my remarks.

I proceed, then, still further to explain the point which I have just suggested, viz. *that Christ not only learned obedience, but he learned it by suffering.*

Already have I adverted, more than once, to the fact, that the obedience of Christ was always perfectly commensurate with his knowledge at any particular point of time. But *obedience*, in the ordinary sense of the word, we are prone to refer principally, if not entirely, to those commands which require active and positive duties. Yet, in the view of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, there is another and a most important branch of obedience, which belonged to that great High Priest, who was to be fitted in all points to compassionate us, and to sympathize with us. It is the will of an all-wise Providence, that all intelligent beings should be put on *probation* or *trial*. But trial, without exposure to

the assault of evil or suffering in some form or other, is an empty name—a mere impossibility. It was the lot of man in paradise; it has been the lot of angels. The Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, as possessing a human nature, could not be exempted from it. He endured it, when Satan tempted him, as he did our first parents in the garden of Eden. He suffered in consequence of the assaults and craftiness and malignity of his adversaries who sought to destroy him. He endured it in the wants and woes of a human body. In a word, "he was tempted, i. e. tried, in all points as we are, although without sin."

There was then something to be learned by him, in order to perfect him as our *compassionate* and *sympathizing* Saviour, by the endurance of suffering. There was one point of obedience which could not be possibly learned, in a true *practical* sense, without actual experience of suffering. It was that of *submission*—unreserved, ready, cheerful submission to the will of God, in the midst of annoyances and distress. It was impossible fully to learn this, in any other way than that of *experience.* Other knowledge must be only of a theoretical or speculative nature. But this last kind of knowledge was not adequate to the occasion. It could not call forth the deep sympathies of the Saviour's soul, nor cause compassion to flow from it in most copious streams, like water from an ever living and overflowing spring. He must needs actually and practically know what we know, in respect to trial and suffering. He must, by his own experience, become acquainted with all the difficulties that lie in the way of unreserved and cheerful submission, under circumstances of agonizing trial. Not even gloom or despondency of mind and overwhelming dread of evils to come, could be excepted from his trials. Witness his agony in the garden of Gethsemane, where his soul was sorrowful even unto death, and his bodily frame so convulsed as to force from it a sweat like to great drops of blood falling to the ground. Witness

the thrice repeated agonizing prayer for deliverance from what was before him; witness that heart-rending complaint on the cross: "My God! why hast thou forsaken me?" And with all this, fail not to notice the obedience which was learned and practically exhibited: "Father, not my will, but thine be done."

Such was the consummation of the lesson which Christ learned by suffering. But it is not merely to Gethsemane and to the cross, that we are to look for evidences of his sufferings. They extended over his whole life; at all events over his whole public life; and by all of them was the great Captain of our salvation made more and more perfect in his practical knowledge of obedience.

Thus much for *explanation*. Let us now pursue our inquiries more directly concerning the subject thus presented to our view, and in another respect. Why does the apostle, in our text and in other passages, lay such stress on that part of Christ's obedience which he learned by *suffering*?

This question leads us to the consideration of several circumstances, of deep interest and of high importance.

In the first place, cheerful submission under the pressure of calamity and suffering, is the most difficult of all the duties which we are required to perform. I need not say one word to prove this. Every one's experience confirms what I aver; and this is sufficient. Submission on our part, in order to be like that of Christ, must not be a mere yielding to calamity, or succumbing when it invades us, because we are unable to resist it, and can make our appeal to no human power in our behalf which can control it. The heathen possess, and have exhibited, such a temper of mind, in its highest perfection. It was a grand principle of religion, if I may so speak, among the Greek and Roman philosophers and poets, that they must submit to uncontrollable destiny or fate, in such composure of mind, as not even to utter any complaint. Such is the highest of all virtues, for example, as exhibited

in the tragedies of Aeschylus; which are all of a religious cast. Nor is such a submission confined to the heathen world, who believed in the doctrine of fatality. Among us, (in most cases, shall I venture to assert?) if sufferers would tell the simple truth in respect to their feelings, they would say: "I submit, because I cannot help myself." Not so did Jesus learn obedience under suffering. Not so, must his followers demean themselves, when the hour of trial comes.

I have said, that true, Christian, cheerful, submission is *the most difficult of all our duties.* And why? First, we shrink, spontaneously and involuntarily, from pain and suffering, from afflictions and deprivations. This shrinking is an attribute of our very nature, which cannot, even by the highest state of piety, be eradicated, or its claims put to silence. The Lord Jesus exhibited this shrinking in its full power, and even in an overflowing measure, at certain seasons of his life. Piety may control it, and hold it in check. But God has not required of us to be unfeeling and insensible. The Gospel enjoins no *Stoicism.* It does not even permit it. Jesus *wept;* and so must all his followers. Jesus agonized in the garden of Gethsemane, and doubtless in other places; and his disciples must do the like. But this only shows the truth of what I have said, namely, that we shrink spontaneously from suffering; else there would be no occasion to weep and to agonize.

But there is another circumstance that needs to be noticed, in respect to the difficulty of submission. It is this, viz., that a ready and filial acquiescence in affliction can be attained *only by a faith which is highly active and vigorous.* Multitudes of the unconverted do indeed bear up under affliction, with composure and even fortitude. This is the effect of a natural courage, and frequently of regard to conventional propriety among men. So far as it goes, it is a natural good. But O! how far does it come short of that temper of the soul, which leads the afflicted to say with all sincerity and earnest-

ness: "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth to him good." "Father, not my will, but thine be done!"

My position is, that only very active and vigorous faith can reach this point. It must be a *filial* view of God's government, and of his wisdom and goodness, that can inspire a truly Christian submission. An ordinary faith may acquiesce in the divine commands which call us to the great circle of *active* duties; for the propriety of them is plain and apparent. But trial—affliction—often come in a shape, and at a time, which seem to render them difficult of explanation. Often, very often, is this the case, during our journey through this vale of tears. It is then, that active and vigorous faith is requisite. Nothing else can ensure obedience. Nor is there any duty in life, that demands so much of strong filial confidence, as that of submission in the depths of affliction.

O what, at such a season, is to become of the world who are unreconciled to God, and have no filial confidence in him? What is to become of them when deep calleth to deep, and all the waves and billows of calamity come over them? Divine and compassionate Redeemer, have mercy upon them!

But to return to our more immediate object. Is it not now apparent, why the apostle, in our text and context, lays so much stress on the *obedience* of Christ as taught by suffering? The consummation of all true practical piety and virtue shone forth in this. And was not Christ, the author of our salvation, the great High Priest who was to make atonement for us, and now liveth to make intercession for us—was he not to be made perfect by the highest of all practical virtues? Was he to enter on his mediatorial office, lacking experience in the most preëminent, most difficult, and most perfect of all the acts of obedience? Not so did it seem good to the wisdom of the eternal Father. According to his determination, "the Captain of our salvation must be made perfect by suffering."

I have merely glanced at this part of our subject, which

might easily occupy a whole discourse. This is all which I can now do. I must turn to another point of view, in which our subject should be placed, and invite, for a few moments, your attention to it.

The active obedience of Christ was, beyond all doubt, to be *perfected;* and this, by acts of obedience the most difficult of all. Yet there was another, and (if possible) more cogent reason still, for the *trial of Christ by sufferings.* The epistle to the Hebrews has in the most forcible manner presented this matter to our view. Jesus was not only to be crowned with the glory of every virtue and grace, but, inasmuch as he undertook to redeem *men*, (passing by the angels), "it behoved him," says the sacred writer, "to be made like to his brethren;" i. e. be made like to them as well in *suffering* as in other things." But why? "In order that he might be a *merciful* and faithful high priest." And how would suffering ensure this? The ready answer is: "In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted [i. e. tried], he is *able* to succour those that are tempted." But what is the *ability* to which the apostle here adverts? Another text gives us the answer: "We have not a high priest, who cannot be touched with a feeling for our infirmities; but *he was in all points tempted as we are*, although without sin."

This unravels the deep mystery of all the Saviour's trials, beyond that measure which was requisite in order to make atonement for sin. Yea, I may venture upon the suggestion, that this presents one object which was in view, even in those very sufferings which he endured for sin. He was to be fully qualified, by the discipline to which he submitted, to be *touched with a feeling for our infirmities.* He, who is not ashamed to call his true disciples *brethren*, must become qualified to feel as a brother towards them, and to *sympathize* as a brother with them. In vain do we seek, (I speak it with reverence), even amid the glories and perfections of the Godhead, for a trait such as is here described. It is indeed

most true, that God can have compassion or mercy on his creatures who are frail and erring; for God so compassionated the world, perishing in wickedness, as to send his Son to redeem them. But *sympathy*, brotherly *human* sympathy in its strictly appropriate sense, belongs not—cannot belong—to the simple Godhead. The *sympathy* of which the texts quoted speak, and which I have now in view, can be the result of nothing but a human nature, a nature that has been tried by actual suffering, *taught* by it, and thus enabled to enter fully into all our wants, our weaknesses, and our woes, as if it actually bore a part in them. The knowledge of divine omniscience in respect to these, is entirely a different thing. It is more like to our knowledge of things, which we have acquired without any actual experience. The Godhead cannot suffer *human* woes. The Godhead, therefore, although it may and does pity them, cannot *experimentally* sympathize with them. But he, who "became flesh and dwelt among us," he who took on him our nature, and has thus permitted us to call him *Brother*—he has a *fellow feeling* with us and for us. To him we may go in all our straits, with the fullest confidence not merely in his omniscience and in his mercy, but in his real *brotherly* sympathy also, which is the result of his own personal sufferings. We feel it to be a great privilege, in the hour of affliction, when we are greeted, and sustained, and comforted, and prayed with, by one of our own fellow men, who can enter into all our sorrows, and cast himself down at the footstool of mercy, and plead for us in language fraught with sympathy, and which our own agitated and excruciated bosoms are unable to command. But, O! what a difference between the best earthly friend we have, and that great High Priest who is touched with a feeling for our infirmities! What a boundless difference! He—he is *mighty* to save, even to the uttermost, all who come unto God through him. He has sources of consolation at his command, which even imagination can-

not limit; and from them he can pour down streams of comfort upon poor weeping sufferers, which shall fill their bosoms with peace, yea, with a flood of consolation; or, to speak with the apostle, "fill them with all the fulness of God."

We must not quit this sacred and delightful theme, without taking another view of it, under a little different aspect. I refer now to *the* WISDOM *and* MERCY *of God, as developed in the wonderful provision of such a sympathizing Saviour.*

I can only touch briefly upon this. First of all, consider for a moment, what the sinner's condition would be, if God had revealed himself only as a God of retributive justice. But allowing, in the next place, that pardon should be offered to the penitent, in case that, as a returning sinner, he would humbly seek for it. Grant that access is allowed him unto the throne of the Eternal. There a God of spotless purity and justice is seated; all radiant in his perfection; whom no mortal eye hath seen, nor can see and live. How shall the poor trembling sinner, conscious of his unnumbered and aggravated offences—how shall he approach that throne, the bare sight of which would seemingly extinguish his vision? He might assay to approach; but his heart would fail him. He would be overpowered by a sense of awful majesty and spotless purity. He would sink down with fear and trembling, even as Isaiah, and Daniel, and Ezekiel did, at a sight of divine splendour. But *now*, when he approaches the throne, a great High Priest is seated there—bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh—a companion in trial, and a comforter in sorrow; a Brother, with all the sympathies of a brother; one who has toiled, and groaned, and wept, and prayed, and been agitated by his own personal sorrows; one, therefore, who can enter into every feeling of distress, which rends the heart of his humble followers. For although he had no sins of his own to repent of, yet "he bore our sins, and carried our sorrows; he was wounded for our transgressions and

bruised for our iniquities." Go then, poor trembling sinner —go then, poor weeping mourner, with every heartstring bruised, if not rent asunder—go to that sympathizing Saviour, clothed still with your own humanity in its glorified state. Go and fall down before him. Pour out your flood of grief in his presence; tell him of every pang, and every sorrow; make mention of every weakness, and every fear; lay before him all your lack of active and powerful faith; tell him how deficient you are in a filial spirit; tell him all these things, and then plead with him to help you. Point him to his own agonies, his own despondency, the mighty struggles of his own breast, in the garden and on the cross, and ask him, beseech him, to sympathize with you —to have mercy upon you, and give you grace adequate to help in your time of need. Make use of this blessed privilege in its full measure. Doubt not his *sympathy*. Cast yourself upon it. You can surely venture to approach a *Brother*. He will receive you with kindness.

I feel my utter inadequacy to do any justice to this part of my subject. O the mysteries of that wisdom and compassion, which have devised such a plan of salvation, and provided such a Saviour, for the poor perishing sinner, for the weeping and disconsolate mourner! How unsearchable the judgments of God! His ways are past finding out. It does seem to me, that all the peculiar wisdom, and compassion, and glory of the gospel, converge toward, and centre in, the point that has now been before us. Where, in all the so called religions on earth, that have ever been devised or spoken of, is there anything to bear comparison with this, or to afford even the most distant resemblance of it? Nothing—no, there is nothing like it. The world by wisdom knew not God. The only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth—he, and he only, hath revealed him. He has revealed to us a *new* and living way of access to the throne of grace, in which we may find adequate help; in which we may come even *bold-*

ly. This—all the religions ever devised by man could not accomplish. Sinners, taught only by them, must still come to God with nothing but trembling and solicitude.

But our great High Priest—see, he has exalted our nature to the throne of the Majesty on high; and there he retains all the sympathies of a brother tried by afflictions. Not only does he invite us by all this to go to him, but by retaining his humanity, he even casts as it were a rainbow around his throne, to soften its radiance, and make it altogether accessible by us.

But where shall I end, in dilating upon such a topic as this? Still, although unwillingly, I am constrained for the present to quit it. Let us proceed, then, next to inquire, what deductions force themselves upon us, in view of the considerations which have been suggested. I can only glance at some of them.

My first remark on this part of my subject is, that if it was necessary for Jesus, a perfectly sinless being, and always ready to do his Father's will, to learn obedience—to come to a practical knowledge of the highest and most difficult part of obedience—by *suffering*, then does it follow, that *all the suffering in the world is not to be put to the account of punishment merely, nor even of chastisement.*

That "the soul which sinneth shall die," is an immutable law of a sin-hating God. The wicked accordingly are punished in some degree in the present world, and in full measure in the next. They may well count a large portion of their misery, here, to be the proper fruits of their sin. But how is it with the children of God? *Punishment*, in its appropriate sense, they do not and cannot receive; for they are forgiven—forgiven in this world, as well as in the next. Why then are not all their sufferings remitted *here*, as well as hereafter? Is not a satisfactory solution of this apparently difficult question found in the subject before us? Jesus —a being of spotless purity—was constrained to learn obe-

dience by what he suffered. The highest improvement of a human nature, even in a state of perfect innocence, could not be reached, it would seem, without trial and suffering. Jesus therefore was subjected to them. *Chastisement* he did not need, and did not undergo, for himself. He was tried, and he suffered, therefore, so far as concerned his own perfection, altogether in accordance with the universal law that extends to all moral agents. Their highest perfection and glory can be attained only through the medium of trial and suffering.

On the like principle God tried Abraham. Job's calamities came partly in such a way. It was a great problem, in this patriarch's day, whether special calamity could take place, without special guilt. All his friends maintained the impossibility of this. Job disputed against them; but still, in many respects, he was much in the dark. What man could never explain, the gospel has unfolded. The Redeemer in his own person has taught us, that the discipline of trial and suffering is necessary to the perfection of our nature, even where sin has not been committed.

If then the Lord Jesus himself found this to be necessary, are his followers, who need chastisement—who are imperfect, lacking in many graces, cleaving to the world, wanting in simplicity and entirety of devotedness to him—are they to complain, when they are cast into depths, and all the waves and billows come over them? No, no; it would be folly and ingratitude to complain. Shall we not submit to that, which is evidently for our betterment? Sinners as we are, and ill-deserving, yea, even hell-deserving, as we are, are we to complain when our Lord and Master disciplines us in such a way as he himself was disciplined, even when he was a Son, and without any sin, in order that his obedience might be complete? See—he points us to his sufferings, and tells us, that as the Captain of our salvation he could never have been perfect without them. And are we, his humble followers, enlisted

under his banner and bound to follow where he leads—are we to complain when called to affliction? Every filial heart responds at once, and declares in the fullest manner, that nothing could be more ungrateful and unbecoming.

I cannot relinquish this deeply interesting, but withal somewhat delicate topic, without suggesting two things, which may guard us against the abuse, or the misunderstanding, of the subject. The one is, that from the fact that trial and suffering are necessary to the highest perfection of our nature, we must not draw the conclusion that trials and sufferings of our own devising, and after the manner of ascetics who of their own will devise and inflict them, promise any thing in the way of spiritual improvement, or of advancing the perfection of our nature. Every thing of this kind, from first to last, is the mere nugatory, fruitless device of man, seeking his own self-righteousness, and endeavouring, at least in part, to dispense with the need of salvation by pure grace, through a suffering and atoning Saviour.

The other remark is, that although it is true, that all suffering in this world is not strictly *penal*, nor even directly in the way of *chastisement*, yet Christians should not be solicitous to make out a distinction in their own individual cases, between what is chastisement, and what may be simply disciplinary for the mere purpose of perfecting their nature. Both chastisement and this latter species of discipline have one and the same end in view. And besides this, every humble Christian is sensible that he deserves more than all the suffering which he is called to undergo. The proper use to be made by the Christian of trial and suffering, from whatever source it comes, is one and the same; and therefore we need not, and should not, exercise our minds to draw distinctions between the *sources* of suffering. Yet still, the apparent victim of numberless and seemingly unparalleled woes, may be comforted with the belief, that some of them may possibly be mere and direct means of purifying his nature. The mo-

ther, weeping over the grave of her newly born infant, that has expired amidst protracted agonies—may she not help to solve the painful doubts that arise in her mind about the justice and the benevolence of God, by the consideration, that, in some way unknown to her, her child, like the great Captain of her salvation, has been made perfect by sufferings? I love to dwell on such a thought; and are there not ten thousand thousand bleeding bosoms of parents, that will cherish it as a precious consolation, in the midst of their agonies?

But I must force myself away from this train of thinking, in order to make my second and last remark; which is, that *the children of God have an eternal and overflowing fountain of consolation opened, in the plan of gospel discipline and salvation uhich is set before them.*

There is no condition, no trial, no sorrow, no gloom and heaviness of spirit, to which it is not adapted, and to which it is not fully adequate for all the relief that it is best for them to receive. Journeying through this vale of tears, they must needs pass through many a dark and gloomy avenue. Storms, yea tempests, of sorrow and distress will assail them, and beat upon them. From the dark cloud, that is over them, the thunders will be heard, and the lightning-flash be seen. Bow to the storm they must; its violence will admit of no effectual resistance. But look! battered and way worn traveller, as thou liest prostrate in the dust by reason of the violence of the tempest; direct your sight beyond the dark and frowning borders of that cloud which is bursting with all its violence upon you. See! There is a streak of clear sky beyond, of golden light diffusing its thousand splendors abroad. I do not speak of the radiance of the natural sun, with his cheering beams, but of the more splendid radiance of the Sun of righteousness, spreading far and wide around him celestial glory, such as beams from the throne of God. That Sun will shine, when darkness and storm, when all other suns and

stars, shall have passed away. It will beam on your path, and conduct you, and cheer you onward, to that blessed place, where the Lord Jesus will be your everlasting light, and the Saviour God a glory that will never wane.

What can I say, now, to mourning friends more comforting than what has already been said? Do they weep over a departed, a most endeared, wife and mother? She was worthy of their tears; yea and of the tears of all around them. A more irreproachable life, a mind more entirely devoted to God, and more full of unwavering faith and confidence in the Saviour, a heart more thoroughly pervaded by benevolence and kindness to all—a better wife, a kinder and better mother—if any can be found, they are rarely indeed to be met with, in such a world as this. She, too, drank in large measure the cup of infirmity and suffering. Some ten years' endurance of a paralytic state, brought with it a great amount of trial. But how peaceful, how meek, how resigned, how even cheerful, was she under all! But—I am forbidden by conjugal delicacy and by filial respect and tenderness, to enlarge on these topics. The single glance that I have taken must suffice. I have known her for thirty-six years, in all the various exhibitions of her character; and I can testify my full conviction, that all which is felt to-day by mourning friends, is fully deserved.

To these dear friends I have only to say: Look at him who learned obedience by suffering. See him at the grave of Lazarus, weeping with Martha and Mary! And will he not be equally present, to-day, to sustain you, and sympathize with you, and comfort you? Most surely he will, if you cast yourselves into the arms of his mercy. There is nowhere else an adequate refuge for you; nor is there any need of other refuge. This is all-sufficient; for he will give grace to help in time of need. Fall down, then, before that adorable Saviour; spread all your sorrows before him; pour them out, in their full measure, into his bosom; and he will aid and

comfort you, under these heart-rending trials. In the world of light and love, you will fully see the reason why you have now beencalled to drink so deeply of the cup of sorrow, and you will there forever bless the hand that has administered it. —Amen.

APPENDIX.

The following notice of Mrs. Woods, intended for the satisfaction of her children, grand-children, and other friends, was written by her bereaved husband.

Mrs. Woods was born in Harvard, Mass., Feb. 29, 1776. Her father, Joseph Wheeler, was, for a time, the Pastor of the Congregational Church, in Harvard; but on account of ill health, he left the ministry, and became a Judge in Worcester County, and afterwards, for a long time, Register of Probate. Mrs. Woods's mother died, when she was young; but she was blessed with a second mother, an intelligent, pious woman, who had been highly esteemed in Boston, as a hopeful convert under the preaching of Whitefield, an active Christian, and an intimate friend of the well known Mrs. Waters and Mrs. Mason. After the death of Mrs. Woods's father, her mother chose her as a companion, and, at that early age, entrusted her with the chief management of the concerns of the family. The pious instruction and example of that discreet and excellent mother had the chief influence, under God, in the culture of her mind and the formation of her character. At an early age Mrs. Woods turned her attention to religion, and through the mercy of God, and by means of the holy Scriptures, and Doddridge's Rise and Progress, and the ministry of Dr. Austin, was brought decidedly to choose the good part, and to enjoy the happiness of a young disciple. She loved the doctrines of grace as set forth in the Scriptures and by her minister; and Christ was to her the chief among ten thousands and altogether lovely. At the age of sixteen she was received into the church. How highly she prized the means of grace, and what evidence she gave of growing piety, and how clearly she exhibited the various fruits of the Spirit, was well known to her minister, and to all acquainted with her.

Oct. 8, 1779, she was united in marriage with the Rev. Leonard

Woods, then minister of West Newbury. How affectionate and amiable her disposition, how inoffensive and discreet her conversation and deportment, how kind and attentive to all around her, especially to the poor, how untiring her activity in domestic duties, during the nine years of her residence there, and how blameless and lovely her whole character, need not be told. In Andover, where she lived near thirty-eight years, she continued to exhibit the same traits of character, as before. She regarded it as a special privilege and pleasure to be connected, as she was here, with a circle of Christian sisters and friends, in whom she had entire confidence. Her husband and her children have no words to tell what a place she held in their hearts while she lived, or the depth of their sorrow at her decease. It was her tender affection, her gentleness, her uniform cheerfulness—it was the law of kindness which was upon her lips—it was her untiring diligence in her appropriate duties, her sincerity and fervor in prayer, and the almost unclouded sunshine of her mind and her countenance, which effectually contributed to diffuse a happiness through her family, above the common lot of man. They do render thanks to God, and they hope to thank him forever, for the gift of such a wife, and such a mother, and for the unnumbered blessings secured to them by the incessant exercise of her conjugal and maternal love, and by the influence of her unostentatious piety.

Mrs. Woods was alive to every object of benevolence. In all that was done for the spread of the gospel and the advancement of Christ's kingdom she took a deep interest. She wished her husband to make liberal contributions to the cause of missions, and every other good cause, and often fixed upon a larger sum than what he had proposed, saying frequently, *we will save it in other ways.* Of late years, while laboring under her infirmity—when her husband informed her of what he had given or intended to give for any benevolent use, she would stretch out her hand to him, and with a glad look, say, *I thank you, my dear husband.*

Almost ten years before she died, she was attacked with paralysis on the left side. For seven or eight years she retained her usual activity of mind, and though obliged to give up those domestic cares in which she had taken so much satisfaction, she manifested a cheerful submission, and spent her days very happily, in such employments as she found suited to her condition; sometimes reading the Scriptures, together with other favorite books, such as Baxter's and Doddridge's Works, Law's Serious Call, Thomas à Kempis, Memoirs of Mrs. Hawkes, Cowper's Life and Works, D'Aubigne's History, Perkin's Residence in Persia, etc.; sometimes recalling and repeating the Assembly's Catechism, which she learned in childhood; sometimes writing letters to her children and friends, and to her husband when he was absent, and not unfrequently when he was at home; and sometimes in attempts at needle work, though

her left hand was palsied and very feeble. During those years, she was usually able to walk with her husband to the chapel, and had great enjoyment in public worship. She never spoke of her infirmity as a *calamity*, or an *affliction*, but always as a *mercy*. Repeatedly, when her husband found her weeping, and inquired for the reason, she said, *I have such a sense of the goodness of God.* She had a peaceful, child-like confidence in God. Some three or four years since, while her husband was walking with her in their grove, he said to her: "my dear wife, though you are infirm, you may survive me; and I have been thinking what arrangement might be most for your comfort." She stopped him at once, and said: *My dear husband, I don't wish to have one thought on that subject; I would rather leave it entirely to my heavenly Father.*

During the last two years of her life, she had frequently an inexpressible restlessness, both day and night. But she still had the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit; although she sometimes said, she was afraid she should be impatient. But her Saviour was with her, and gave her peace. The day before she died, though exceedingly feeble, she was able to converse, and one of the last things she said to her husband was, *that Christ was precious to her.* So he had been for more than half a century. The heaven she had desired was *to be where Jesus is.*

The religion of Mrs. Woods was peculiarly experimental, practical, and scriptural. For many years before her marriage, and occasionally after, she kept a private diary, solely for her own satisfaction and improvement. From that diary extracts might be made of the same general character with those taken from the diary of Harriet Newell, and other intelligent and pious women, showing her deep sense of her own sinfulness and her deficiencies, her very modest estimation of her own character, her aspirings after perfect holiness, her inward conflicts, her reliance for wisdom and strength and all good upon her gracious Saviour, her happiness in communion with him, her desire to do good, and her fervent prayers in behalf of herself and others. But who that knows what an unpretending, retiring disposition she had, and how instinctively she shrunk from the public view, could think it proper to remove the veil of secresy, which she intended should be spread over her private writings?

With Mr. Schauffler, who had lived in her house, and with some other missionaries, she had a free correspondence. And their letters, together with the Missionary Herald, were a source of great comfort to her, while laboring under her bodily infirmities.

She was the mother of ten children, who all lived to a mature age. But with two of them, one son and one daughter, she was called to part. Her feelings on the death of her daughter, were indicative of the habitual state of her mind. It was but a few months after the commencement of her paralysis. She could not see her

beloved Sarah during the sickness which proved mortal. When told of her death, she said composedly, but with inexpressible tenderness: *Nothing is too precious to give up to Christ.*

But the work of that dear partner and mother and friend is done. She has finished the active duties in which she took such pleasure, and the protracted sufferings which she endured with such a patient, subdued spirit. Her death was most peaceful; and her bereaved family, in the midst of their sorrows, have the sweet consolation to say: *She sleeps in Jesus: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.*

Mrs. Woods had at her decease, three sons and five daughters, three daughters-in-law and five sons-in-law, and twenty-one grandchildren. All of these she most sincerely loved. And she offered up many prayers for their present and future well-being.

A few extracts from letters of condolence, which have been received from ministers of the gospel, and which show in what estimation Mrs. Woods was held by those best acquainted with her, will afford special pleasure to relatives and friends. Similar extracts might be made from many other letters.

The first is from the letter of a very beloved minister, who during his connection with the Seminary and afterwards, had a particular acquaintance with Mrs. Woods. He says: "All my recollections of her are very sweet, and, I may almost say, *heavenly.* For she ever seemed to me to possess much of the benevolent kindness of him who went about doing good—and *heavenly,* in this view, is by no means too strong a word. I think of her, and shall ever think of her, as full of guileless friendship, and Christian love and faithfulness."

The next extract is from the letter of one who was early a member of the Seminary, and is now a minister of high standing in Massachusetts. Though not able to be present at the funeral, he entered very feelingly into the circumstances of the mournful occasion, as though he had been present. His letter was written at the very hour which he knew was appointed for the funeral services. He thus writes: "What shall I say in taking leave of the remains of that honored and beloved mother in Israel, who for more than half a century has been a public character in the church of Christ, and has acted a more prominent part than often falls to the lot of woman. Her attractive smile, her sweet voice, her benignant spirit and unostentatious deportment, I do not forget. As to her domestic habits, social disposition and religious character—I have always supposed her to be a model for Christian women. How many thousands have felt the influence of her spirit and example! . . . It will be known among the Western Indians, in Southern Asia, in Armenia, and in the islands of the Pacific, that a friend and benefactress in prayers of faith and labors of love, has finished her work on earth. Sweet release to her, as we confidently trust—she having completed what of duty and suffering was assigned to her on earth."

The last extract is from the letter of a distinguished minister,

now advanced in life, whose acquaintance with Mrs. Woods extended through forty-six years. He says: "I know, my dear brother, that your mansion is made desolate, and your heart not less so. The rupture of such a connection must cause some bleedings of the inmost heart. The *future* of life must derive a deeper shade from the late event; but is not a new lustre cast upon its *close?* It was a beautiful thought of Beza after the death of Calvin: *Since he is gone, life has become less sweet, and death less bitter.*—I revert with pleasure to my first acquaintance with Mrs. Woods, and to the subsequent period. Few, very few have exhibited such delightful evidence of the power of religion, and of its sweet, dignifying, consoling influence. Hers was that symmetry of character, and that equable, uninterrupted exhibition of spiritual excellence, which seemed to give a resistless *demonstration* of the school in which she was taught, and the world to which she was going. I cannot but think, that even in the years of her debility, she gave the crowning evidence of the reality of her religion, and her uncommon proficiency in the school of Christ.—*And what is she now? Whom does she behold? And what does she enjoy?*"